Abstract

This article examines research approaches that were used in conducting a study of the long-term effects of youth exchange. The research focused on Germans and Americans who, as teenagers, experienced homestays in the other country between 1951 and 1987. The study was designed to offset several of the methodological weaknesses that are often associated with exchange research, such as the relative inattention to theory development, longitudinality, behavioral change, historical context, and autobiographical data. The study was thus constructed to combine qualitative and quantitative approaches, to emphasize life stories, to generate hypotheses and questionnaires grounded in interview data, to be sensitive to differences in historical frames of reference among respondents, and to identify relevant comparison groups. Both practical and methodological aspects of the research strategy are discussed, including
cross-national collaboration, gaining access to respondents and data, sample definition, the conduct of interviews, hypothesis formulation, questionnaire construction, surveying, and data analysis. Recommendations stemming from the assessment of the approach used in this study are offered in conclusion and address such methodologically relevant areas as the use of life stories, the identification of analytic criteria for assessing the success of exchange, differentiation among types of sojourn, the development of interdisciplinary research and program models, independent verifications of exchangees' self-reports of behavioral change, quasi-experimental studies, and coordination among exchange researchers and their studies.

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